

2015 NCEA Assessment Report

English Level 1 90849, 90850, 90851

Part A: Commentary

Comment on the overall response of candidates to 2015 examinations for all achievement standards covered by this report.

Many candidates are still writing responses that are too wordy and lengthy. In many cases where additional pages were used, the quality of the response was not necessarily enhanced by the extra pages. Candidates can often fare better with a concise, succinct answer that is well-planned and thoughtful.

The addition of the advisory note, printed in red, about which text type to write on has now been included for the past 2-3 years and has meant that far fewer candidates have written in the wrong booklet. However, this practice has not been eradicated and candidates must be reminded that it is their responsibility to answer in the correct booklet. Candidates must be prepared for what to expect in the examination, and take their time to ensure that they are following all instructions carefully.

Some candidates are still relying on regurgitating previously written and rote-learned essays. Although it is good practice to use previous examination questions to prepare for the examination, candidates must be aware that the questions change every year. In 2015, the omission of a straight 'theme' question highlighted that many students were ill-prepared for this possibility, and they tended to write their pre-learned theme question as is, without adapting it in any way, which meant that they did not achieve. It is therefore essential that students are able to answer the question as it is asked in the examination, which often requires them to adapt to small changes in styles of questioning across all three papers. Effective answers saw candidates shape studied material into responses tailored directly to the questions. This explicit linking often saw candidates move to the higher grades. Rote learned essays that make no attempt to answer the question do not meet the standard required to achieve.

Some questions in AS 90849 and AS 90850 proved far more popular than others and others were completely ignored, which may indicate that teachers are concentrating on specific aspects of the standards, or that students prefer to answer on specific aspects.

The choice of text studied influenced candidate results. Texts that were rich in meaning and relevance for students yielded good results. These texts were often age appropriate, and included relevant and engaging themes. Texts need to be of sufficient length and depth to enable criteria to be met, and allow candidate to develop a convincing and perceptive response. It is interesting to note that there seemed to be a fixed number of favourite texts, which have not changed much over the past 10 years. There were very few 'new' texts.

Although many excellence candidates were able to write effectively about events beyond the text, some candidates strayed too far from their text in their responses. Candidates are reminded to address the text first and supply sufficient evidence from the text before delving into events beyond the text.

Candidates can be assisted to develop the skills and knowledge required to achieve by:

- learning to recognise the purpose and audience of texts, whether familiar or unfamiliar, so they can understand why writers / directors manipulate language
- becoming familiar with the language and ideas needed to show understanding of texts such as the terminology used to describe features of language and how these features work to reveal purpose and audience
- becoming familiar with the idea of reading "on the lines," for literal meaning; "between the lines," to infer ideas in the immediate context; and "beyond the lines" connecting the text to the candidates' own world, to other texts and beyond, while still maintaining links to the text itself
- practising selecting the best question for their text. Many candidates choose a question based on a single word (e.g. 'theme') without considering the meaning of the question
- practising planning their response. Candidates who formulated a thorough plan of their essay generally answered well
- practicing shaping their learned material into a personal response to the question, rather than reproducing pre-learned material and trying to twist the topic or question to fit

- ensuring that they address both parts of the question in their response
- using the key words in the question as part of their answer in order to ensure they understand the question.

Part B: Report on standards

1. Assessment Report for 90849: Show understanding of specified aspect(s) of studied written text(s), using supporting evidence

<p>Achieved</p>	<p>Candidates who were assessed as Achieved commonly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • used a formulaic structure • referenced some specific details or quotes, but did not always fully integrate these into the question • provided a summary of the text along with some analysis but did not always adequately address both parts of the question • often focused too much on plot • began to link the text to the real world, although often in a superficial fashion • wrote either a brief answer or a very lengthy answer that went round in circles • A4 answers often mentioned, though didn't fully elaborate on, the author's purpose • some response to the 'explain' aspect of the questions were implied rather than explicit • some weak answers 'snuck' in by making a crucial link to the second part of the question right at the end of the essay.
<p>Not Achieved</p>	<p>Candidates who were assessed as Not Achieved commonly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lacked specific detail or direct address of the question • demonstrated limited understanding of the text, providing mostly plot summary • provided personal opinion or comments that were unrelated to the question • wrote poorly structured / organised responses • chose the wrong question for their text • did not address the second part of the question • provided no concrete evidence from the text • wrote very short responses or incomplete essays. • posed arguments / statements what were contradictory or illogical and/or unrelated to the text and/or question • used rote learned responses which did not match the question.
<p>Achieved with Merit</p>	<p>Candidates who were assessed as Achieved with Merit commonly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • answered both parts of the question convincingly, with appropriate references to the text and quotes which were relevant to the question • demonstrated convincing understanding of the text with a clear, structured response that developed and connected several points, making reference either directly or by implication, to the author's purpose • incorporated some discussion of the text as a whole or offered some element of personal insight that went beyond the text • linked text to the real world, though sometimes as superficial 'add ons' at the end of a paragraph • wrote essays that were around 3 pages in length, often longer • often gave more than one character/symbol/setting in their response.
<p>Achieved with Excellence</p>	<p>Candidates who were assessed as Achieved with Excellence commonly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrated a perceptive understanding supported by significant evidence towards both parts of the question, using supporting contextual detail to connect their response to the text as a whole, in addition to making links to wider societal impact or providing personal insight • showed a mature appreciation for the wider context of the text, and often went beyond the text to include societal/pop culture implications and/or the candidates own personal understanding • sometimes compared their chosen text to others • wrote with flair and confidence

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wove quotes/evidence/links seamlessly through their answer • used sophisticated expression, sustained fluency, insightful use of specifics from the text.
Standard specific comments	<p>Candidates wrote successfully when they specifically addressed the key words of the question in their response.</p> <p>Convincing answers showed familiarity with the text, convincing evidence and an ability to relate to the text. Some answers lost conviction because they were too long and became too formulaic.</p> <p>Some questions were far more popular than others, most notably question 2 (character). Very few students answered question 6 on structure.</p> <p>Candidates who related their response to their own personal experience or world events needed to also focus on the details and idea(s) in the text within their answer to their selected question.</p> <p>The selection of text(s) needed to have a level of complexity that would enable candidates to meet the standard at Achieved, Merit or Excellence.</p> <p>Some texts that were very successful for candidates who gained Merit or Excellence were: "Looking for Alaska" (or any John Green novel) "Night", "Animal Farm", "Of Mice and Men", "Lord of the Flies", "Macbeth" (or any Shakespeare text), "The secret Lives of Bees", "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time", and War Poetry.</p> <p>There were some comparisons between two or more short texts and this often resulted in more able candidates gaining more than Achieved, although some students who compared texts lacked the indepth discussion and detail to achieve with excellence.</p> <p>There were also some very good, interesting responses to contemporary texts such as song/ spoken word lyrics, although these were rare.</p> <p>Other texts seemed to limit candidate's responses and included: "On the Sidewalk Bleeding," "Ka Kite Bro", "The Last Spin," and "The Boy in Striped Pyjamas." Some contemporary songs were also limiting.</p>

2. Assessment Report for 90850: Show understanding of specified aspect(s) of studied visual or oral text(s), using supporting evidence

Achieved	<p>Candidates who were assessed as Achieved commonly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • answered both parts of a chosen question, but this could have been uneven and some content non-specific • planned their response • knew their text(s) at a satisfactory level • implied knowledge of at least one visual, or oral language feature • used key words to structure their response, although this could have been inconsistent • followed a set structure for paragraphs that was repeated throughout the response • attempted to include comment regarding a creator's purpose in producing a text • made at least ONE and often two relevant point to answer the specific aspect(s) of the question • used at least two recognised/acceptable visual techniques and showed how these linked to their essay idea being explored • chose a question they understood or was better suited to their studied text • used 'dialogue' as their only technique – but this did get to low A.
Not Achieved	<p>Candidates who were assessed as Not Achieved commonly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • did not answer one, or both parts of a question • did not address the question beyond the topic sentence of a paragraph • did not include visual, or oral language features in their answer • did not provide specific evidence from a text to support their views • reproduced a rote-learned answer without adapting this content to a new question. • produced a plot summary • did not read question statement carefully and thus did not answer the specifics of the question • chose inappropriate questions • wrote insufficient responses (half to one page) lacking necessary development • wrote predominantly re-telling of the storyline

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wrote overly long answers that, by the end, often marred an initial possible Achieve grade • attempted to use one technique but this was not relevant/had no link to the essay idea. (e.g.: a self-evident or generalised quote) • used vague/imprecise visual features (“used a mid-shot to show the idea...”/ “technique is conflict...”).
<p>Achieved with Merit</p>	<p>Candidates who were assessed as Achieved with Merit commonly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • produced a planned answer that was largely focused on the question • answered both parts of the question, in a semi-detailed, convincing manner • provided a range of visual, and / or oral language features to support their views, often commenting on how these features worked in combination to produce specific effects • produced a consistently coherent response • discussed the effect of specific visual, and or oral language features in the text(s), moving toward the director’s purpose in using these techniques • displayed an awareness of the whole text, and the director’s purpose(s) in presenting certain aspects to a viewer / audience • understood the specifics of the question • explored/discussed both part of the question and focused on the key words (e.g. ‘character changes’ / “created impact” • used two or more relevant visual/verbal techniques. These were closely linked to the idea(s) being explored • showed ‘convincing’ details’ but usually not more than high quality description • sometimes linked to relevant ideas/issues outside the text.
<p>Achieved with Excellence</p>	<p>Candidates who were assessed as Achieved with Excellence commonly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focused consistently on the question • tended to weave both parts of the question into paragraphs • displayed a comprehensive understanding of visual, and / or oral language features employed in the text(s), and their effects • discussed how visual, and / or oral language features work together to create a specific effect • offered insight into messages presented in a text, and the director’s intention in delivering these, applying this information to a wider context • provided perception that was not ‘taught’; rather, a clear personal interpretation of the text(s) studied was evident • often used more than two visual/verbal features in a precise manner • inter-wove examples of dialogue, visual features throughout essay • sustained the idea(s) sufficiently • showed a good appreciation of director purpose • understood and could describe lucidly how the viewer response was ‘manipulated’. (linked to point above) • used precise visual/verbal features linked to director purpose • established a focused, literate commentary and stayed to this throughout the essay • understood irony and aspects that created mood/tone – this often produced the “perceptive understanding” • sometimes linked their text ideas to similar issues in other texts/outside in contemporary society • incorporated a sense of maturity / personal responsiveness to the issue in the text • chose ‘good’ questions for their texts (eg strong –ve/+ve father/son relationship in ‘Billy Elliot’).

Standard specific comments

It was pleasing to see many responses where candidates obviously understood the assessment criteria and included visual and/or oral language features in well-structured essays. These candidates clearly and concisely answered the question, and thus achieved well.

The main problem of the standard this year appeared to be students who were producing rote-learned essays that discussed themes or characters, but did not actually address the specifics of the question. Similarly some students tried to fit their rote-learned essay into other questions (such as 'symbols'), but this was sometimes poorly done. Students who were attempting to use rote-learned, pre-prepared essays were largely disadvantaged.

There were many 5-9 page answers – students were writing far too much. 'Less can be more' or "adequate" but long, plot driven answers tended to detract from an initial potentially favourable assessment.

There is a group of about 10 films that are used throughout the country; some of these are really old films - Juno, Remember the Titans, Billy Elliott, Slumdog Millionaire, What's Eating Gilbert Grape?

Given the prominence of film in our society, it is disappointing to see the lack of variety in these film answers.

Positively, many candidates understood the requirements of this standard, and attempted to produce a structured response that included visual / oral language features in support their views. There were however, a number of responses where students knew their texts, but did not adapt what they knew to fit the demands of a task, or did not include specific reference to visual / oral language features to support their views, which would separate responses from the Written Text paper.

Candidates need to write evenly about both parts of their selected question throughout their response, proving they understand their chosen text(s), and how aspects have been created, plus provide comment as to a creator's purpose(s) in presenting ideas to viewer.

Correct question choice was crucial for a candidate's success; some students misinterpreted what symbolism was, or focused on this briefly, preferring to write about ideas, while candidates who did not understand the meaning of structure were unable to correctly answer this question.

Engagement with a text of sufficient complexity was required to access a Merit, or Excellence grade. This did not mean that the studied text had to be 'modern'; equally insightful responses were submitted for more 'traditional' texts where engagement was clearly evident. Some texts that seemed to limit responses included: 'Bend it like Beckham', 'Freedom Writers', 'The Blind Side', 'Divergent', 'Mud', 'The Dark Knight'. Some texts that were successful for candidates who gained Merit, or Excellence included: 'Band of Brothers', 'Billy Elliot', 'Boy', 'Dead Poets' Society', 'Gattaca', 'Slumdog Millionaire', 'The Butler', 'The Help', 'The Imitation Game', 'Gallipoli', 'The Intouchables', "Hugo".

The short films worked really well with the techniques question.

Pleasing to see a number of NZ made films being used. (e.g.: 'Dark Horse', 'Boy').

Some very good responses to documentaries ('The Cove', 'Love, Speed and Loss') although range of possible questions were more limited perhaps.

Some TV based (episode) texts used. They did not seem to give the candidate the same choice of questions to attempt – mostly Q1 & Q2 attempted.

Q1 (Relationship) second most popular question attempted. Produced many Ns /low Achs as students struggled to overcome a re-telling of the storyline. Best answers chose a clearly defined (teacher-student/parent-child, bully-victim) relationship, usually in a heightened sense of conflict.

Q2 (character) most popular – 31%. Some candidates forgot "changes" aspect. This question contributed to the most As but was less effective in the Es.

Q3 (opening scene) was better handled by a majority of students. Weaker students did not know where "opening" ended, however.

Q4 (setting) was well-handled and did often allow students to incorporate their 'learned'

	<p>response as part of the theme/idea aspect of the question.</p> <p>Q5. Few students seemed to understand ‘symbol’ and often defaulted to character (as the italicised note stated they could) but did not understand the ‘representative’ nature inherent in the question. This often produced a character essay and not a symbolism essay. Some understood the symbolism (“mockingjay bird in Hunger Games as symbol of hope...” but did not explore how this was achieved as a ‘film’). That is, treated the idea as a general text idea and not linked to specific visual features.</p> <p>Q6 (structure) least popular and most poorly answered. Most did not understand the question and produced plot-based summaries.</p> <p>Q7 (incident-s) tended produced more high As/low Ms but fewer Es. The tendency was to drift into plot summary.</p> <p>Q8 (important technique) was the most effectively answered. But many weaker answers did not sufficiently explore “impact”. Tendency to state techniques and forget purpose/impact. However, it did produce the highest number of Es.</p> <p>Best questions for top grades/number of students attempting: Q 8 (techniques—impact) Q4 (setting - idea) Q7 (incident(s) - idea) Q3 (opening scene - importance).</p>
--	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

3. Assessment Report for 90851: Show understanding of significant aspects of unfamiliar written text(s) through close reading, using supporting evidence

Achieved	<p>Candidates who were assessed as Achieved commonly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • answered the question • wrote something for each section • used evidence from the text • identified some relevant form of change, different perspectives or experiences in the text, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q1: recognised the change in the writer’s experience from warm and lively to deserted and frightening • Q2: identified the different attitudes towards the dog, usually by comparing the writer’s attitude with the owner’s or farmer’s • Q3: showed understanding of the writer’s experience of gardening as mixed with highs and lows, noting that the positives were seen to outweigh the negatives • commented on evidence from the text • showed that they understood what they had read • had read and understood the introductory sentence for each text • specified what mood (Q1) / attitude (Q2) / feeling (Q3) was being communicated: • mentioned both aspects of then and now (Q1), and positives and negatives (Q2&3).
Not Achieved	<p>Candidates who were assessed as Not Achieved commonly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • left some sections blank • wrote a brief answer only • did not identify any change, different perspectives or experiences in the text • misunderstood the situation being described in the text • had not read the explanatory sentence introduction to the text • gave a definition of a language feature without explaining its use in the text • wrote general explanations of what language features were • wrote about “the writer’s mood / attitude / feeling”, but did not actually say what that was.

<p>Achieved with Merit</p>	<p>Candidates who were assessed as Achieved with Merit commonly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • responded to the question, often introducing their responses with expressions like “this showed...”, “this helped me to understand...”, “the writer did this because...” • accurately identified the mood of the piece with language features and textual examples to support how this was created • accurately identified changes, different perspectives or experiences in the text and how these affected the overall writer’s message • wrote something for each section indicated • used the bullet point suggestions to structure the answers for Part [c] questions • used detailed evidence from throughout the texts • analysed the way the writers had written the texts • showed awareness of different points of view • convincingly identified both aspects of then and now (Q1), and positives and negatives (Q2&3) • differentiated between the writer and the narrator/persona.
<p>Achieved with Excellence</p>	<p>Candidates who were assessed as Achieved with Excellence commonly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wrote engaging responses with integrated examples and techniques woven throughout • wrote fluently and succinctly, perceptively analysing evidence from throughout the text • discussed changes, different perspectives or experiences confidently and perceptively • demonstrated an understanding of the deeper or more subtle meanings within the text • showed an in-depth understanding of the purpose of why the author chose to use particular language features • commented with thoughtful detail on the situations and perspectives in each text • differentiated between the writer and the narrator/persona • perceptively analysed the way the writer had written the text • wove analysis of techniques into broader discussion of the situation/ideas in the text • appreciated the writers’ use of techniques (particularly humour and tone) for specific purpose.
<p>Standard specific comments</p>	<p>The texts were engaging and accessible and the candidates who wrote seemed to genuinely enjoy them.</p> <p>Candidates need to interpret questions accurately. A critical first step is to identify key words within the question itself, particularly in part [c]. Many ignored the key words that indicated the answer needed to show changed experience of the setting [Text A], different attitudes towards the dog [Text B] and experience of gardening [Text C] As a result, some candidates struggled because they were not answering the question.</p> <p>Candidates also need to read the introductory sentence for each text in the resource booklet, which is critical to understanding the text. For example, several candidates missed key details about text 1 in the introductory sentence, which indicates that the grandfather in ‘Arrival at Magpie Hall’ was dead.</p> <p>Some candidates seem limited in their kete of language features and techniques.</p> <p>It would be helpful if candidates examined AS90851 exemplars which are published on the NZQA website which indicate how to answer these questions.</p>